

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 14, 2017

Agenda Item: Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area Conifer Expansion Treatment

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

Background:

The Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA (BCWMA) serves as critical winter range for a herd of approximately 1,000 elk. The unique intermountain rough-fescue grassland and mixed conifer forest ecotone on BCWMA provides ideal winter conditions for elk and deer. Due to fire suppression over the past 100 years, conifers - mainly ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir have slowly expanded onto the rough-fescue grasslands and into isolated aspen stands. This conifer expansion is resulting in the loss of important grassland and aspen vegetation across the BCWMA. To address this resource concern, we propose to remove all ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir on the grasslands and within aspen stands throughout the approximately 100-acre project area (see map). This proposal would provide direct wildlife habitat benefits, consistent with statutory direction for the FWP forestry program (87-1-622, MCA) to “address fire mitigation, pine beetle infestation, and wildlife enhancement...”

Public Involvement Process & Results: Upon endorsement by the Commission, FWP would conduct an environmental analysis in compliance with MEPA that would include a full 30-day public comment period and may also include a public field tour of the project area contingent on public interest.

Alternatives and Analysis: The No Action alternative would allow key habitat features to deteriorate over time resulting in the loss of winter range capacity on the BCWMA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the Commission endorse the proposed action, allowing FWP to complete further analyses and receive public input on this proposal. The intent of this proposal is to retain and restore habitats that are of high priority on the BCWMA.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse the conifer expansion treatment on the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA as proposed, allowing FWP to proceed with additional planning, analysis, and public involvement.